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Search for a New Party Leader Focuses on Few Men in Politburo

The search for a successor to Yuri Andropov as Soviet Communist Party chief has focused on a handful of key players in the party's Politburo. The following profiles were written by Celestine Bohlen and A. D. Horne of The Washington Post Foreign Service:

ROMANOV

In the absence of a then-ailing Soviet president Yuri Andropov, the keynote speech at November's anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was given by Politburo member Grigori Romanov. A year and a half before, on the anniversary of Lenin's death, the key speech was given by Andropov, then a possible successor to Leonid Brezhnev.

The parallel, duly noted by Kremlinologists, is one reason why Romanov, who shares a last name with the dynasty overthrown by the revolution, is now considered a contender for Andropov's job. Romanov, who turned 61 this month, has been a Politburo member since 1976 and a secretary of the Central Committee since June. Before that, he headed the local Communist Party in Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city.

It was in Leningrad that Romanov earned a reputation as a tough administrator, ideological conservative and an outspoken supporter of the Soviet military-industrial establishment. Under his reign, the Leningrad economy became increasingly dominated by heavy and defense-related industries, a sector that Romanov now oversees on the national level.

Born in the Novgorod region in 1923, Romanov is considered a member of the Politburo's younger generation. After serving in the Soviet Army during World War II, he graduated from the Leningrad Ship-

building Institute in 1953, the year of Stalin's death. He then went to work as an engineer at the shipbuilding works in Leningrad where he began as a party organizer and gradually rose through the local party ranks to become district party secretary in 1970. During that time, he apparently came under the influence of the late Mikhail Suslov, the ideologist of the Soviet party and long-time Politburo member.

Romanov's career clearly benefited from Andropov's brief tenure. Andropov appointed him to the Central Committee Secretariat last year apparently to oversee the country's heavy industry, including the defense sector. But he also had done well under Brezhnev and was reportedly mentioned in a 1979 CIA briefing paper as a "possible Brezhnev successor."

His handicap is lack of experience in Moscow and within the national party apparatus, and minimal exposure to the outside world. Perhaps to round out his experience, Romanov in January was sent to the West German Communist Party congress in Nuremberg, where he gave a speech assailing U.S. policy.

Romanov has struck some western observers as unpolished and narrow in his thinking. Talking to a group of U.S. senators in 1978 about Carter's difficulties in getting SALT II ratified by the Democratic-controlled Senate, he asked, "But can't you discipline them?"

During Brezhnev's decline, a rumor circulated that Catherine the Great's dinner service, borrowed from the Hermitage Museum, was smashed at the wedding party of Romanov's daughter. The report, spread perhaps by political enemies, was used to illustrate Romanov's alleged penchant for the high life.

EXCERPTED
